Smoking... Pavlovian Technique on Campus

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Psychologists at California State College, Los Angeles, have combined Pavlovian conditioning techniques with the heady aroma of hot, stale cigarette smoke to develop what they feel is a sure-fire method for breaking the smoking habit.

About 100 students and faculty have participated in the 16 month experiment in which a machine automatically blows heated smoke at them as they puff on a cigarette.

Psychologist Dr. Erwin Lublin, head of the experiment, says the method has proven about 50 per cent effective in permanently stopping people from smoking.

"The aroma of stale cigarette smoke is very unpleasant, even nauseating," Dr. Lublin said.

"After several sessions, the smoker begins to associate his cigarette with the unpleasant smell. The sensation becomes so strong he can no longer light up without feeling a little sick."

It's pure classical conditioning. The cigarette of the smoker becomes associated with the smoke until they are one and the same. He usually stops smoking within a few days, and most of our subjects have not gone back to the habit," he said.

Of the 100 subjects in the experiment, most have been smokers for more than 11 years. Most have smoked more than 33 cigarettes a day for those 11 years.

Yet, through Dr. Lublin's methods, half of the subjects have stopped smoking for good within seven days.

Booster sessions are available for those who feel they may be sliding back. The sessions are almost totally effective in stopping a return to the habit.

According to Dr. Lublin, none of the much-discussed side-effects of kicking the habit have appeared in his subjects.

"None have put on extreme amounts of weight, or shown great amounts of nervousness. There is a temporary nervousness, of course, especially for those who have been chain smokers for a greater part of their adult lives," he said.

He added that the nervousness usually disappears after the first three days, when smokers are experiencing their greatest withdrawal symptons.

These early withdrawal symptoms are combatted in several ways. Deep-breathing exercises and chewing gum are the most successful measures.

Two other smoking cure methods, other than the smoke-blowing machine, have been tested during the experiment, but have proven far less successful in permanently breaking the smoking habit.

A heavily advertised commercial preparation designed to stop smoking has proved the least effective.

Smoking in time to a metronome was originally successful, but has tapered off in effectiveness.

In this experiment, smokers were forced to take a puff from their cigarettes every three seconds.

"They learned that smoking fast was very unpleasant. But, when they left the experiment, they could smoke at a normal pace again, so it wasn't really effective in stopping smoking, except it taught them not to smoke quickly," Dr. Lublin said.

"The conditioning method is the most effective, since it makes the subject dislike his own cigarette to the extent that he may never touch one again."

The techniques used in the Cal State program were first developed by psychologists in Amsterdam, where they proved equally effective.

Of all the current experiments undergoing study in the United States, none has met with the great measure of success in permanently stopping smoking that Dr. Lublin's experiment has.

In most other studies, about 20 per cent of the subjects have stopped smoking permanently. In Dr. Lublin's study, the figure runs about 50 per cent.

"Many studies are initially very successful in stopping smoking. But, few of the subjects stop smoking permanently.

"In the study here, almost 100 per cent of the subjects initially stopped smoking, but only 50 per cent continued to refrain from smoking. This still is significantly better than any other study I am aware of," Dr. Lublin said.

Eager to move on to other fields of study, Dr. Lublin would like to turn his findings over to the government or the American Cancer Society to continue on thier own.

"I've been on this project for over a year now. I'd like to start work on other behaviorial problems, so I'm hoping that when my paper is published the government will take the study off my hands." he said.

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